

Testimony in **SUPPORT** of SB284: “AN ACT INCREASING THE AGE FROM EIGHT TO EIGHTEEN YEARS FOR AN INCOME-ELIGIBLE PERSON TO OBTAIN MEDICAL ASSISTANCE REGARDLESS OF IMMIGRATION STATUS”

Dear Members of the Human Services Committee of Connecticut General Assembly:

My name is Eden Almasude and I am a registered voter in New Haven. I am a physician specializing in Child & Adolescent Psychiatry and work at Yale-New Haven Hospital and the Albert J. Solnit Children’s Center in Middletown. I am also an organizer with the Semilla Collective of New Haven.

I stand in support of SB 284: AN ACT INCREASING THE AGE FROM EIGHT TO EIGHTEEN YEARS FOR AN INCOME-ELIGIBLE PERSON TO OBTAIN MEDICAL ASSISTANCE REGARDLESS OF IMMIGRATION STATUS. Expanding access to HUSKY up to age 18 regardless of immigration status is an important step in making sure our community has access to the healthcare we all need and deserve.

The U.S. Surgeon General has highlighted the crisis of children’s mental health precipitated by the COVID-19 pandemic. I witness this daily, working with children ages 3-18 at the Yale Child Study Center, Yale-New Haven Hospital, and Solnit Children’s Center. Due to lack of insurance, many children have little or no access to mental health services. Without affordable healthcare, both physical and mental health conditions worsen and a child is more likely to reach a crisis state requiring emergency and inpatient care. The Surgeon General’s advisory notes that the pandemic disproportionately impacts vulnerable youth, including those children in low-income and immigrant households. Expanding HUSKY to include *all* children is a crucial first step to addressing this rapidly-worsening mental health crisis.

Access to outpatient services will help to relieve the burden on our pediatric emergency rooms and inpatient units. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of children presenting to the ER with mental health concerns, and this has only worsened over the past two years. Our healthcare systems are overwhelmed, which has led to children staying for up to two months *in the emergency room* waiting for an inpatient bed.

Health inequities such as lack of insurance prevent healthcare workers from providing the care that our patients need. Even for children who can access some clinics on a sliding-scale basis, cost remains a significant barrier. I cannot refer the family to psychosocial supports which can reduce stress and improve family wellbeing. Other children may have insurance themselves, but their parents are excluded from HUSKY coverage because of migration status. Children’s health depends on the wellbeing of their parents and other caregivers; we need to work towards opening HUSKY access to parents and other adults.

SB 284 is an essential action for public health, for healthcare workers, and for our children and families. I support SB 284 and I ask the committee to support and pass this legislation.

Thank you for your time,

Eden Almasude, MD
Semilla Collective of New Haven
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